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Holocaust remembrance

Programme of outreach on the "Holocaust and the United Nations"

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/7 on Holocaust remembrance, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a programme of outreach on the subject of the "Holocaust and the United Nations" as well as to take measures to mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education, in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide. In planning the outreach programme, the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat has pursued established as well as innovative ways to broaden its reach and deepen its impact. Endeavouring to honour the memory of the victims and learn from the circumstances that led to and perpetuated the Holocaust, the Department has initiated new contacts with civil society organizations worldwide that have a proven record in Holocaust remembrance and education, and will continue to forge new partnerships with them and others. Simultaneously, the Department gears specific events to Member States to support them in addressing the mandates contained in resolution 60/7.

Core programme elements include: a commemorative event each January with a keynote speaker and a solemn performing arts element; companion exhibits on various aspects of the issue and with different means of visual expression; an annual briefing by experts for Member States and civil society partners; partnerships with the principal institutions in the field and joint ventures with them; collaboration on events with and dissemination of materials to the global network of United Nations information centres, services and offices; media outreach; a gateway website; a film series and a discussion paper series. The Department continues to build relationships that will widen the range of activities offered under the programme as it identifies new opportunities for partnership.

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I. Introduction

1. On 1 November 2005, the General Assembly adopted resolution 60/7 entitled "Holocaust remembrance", and resolved that the United Nations would designate 27 January as an annual International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust. The Assembly urged Member States to develop educational programmes that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide, and in that context commended the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research.

2. In the same resolution, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to establish a programme of outreach on the subject of the "Holocaust and the United Nations" as well as to take measures to mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education, in order to help to prevent future acts of genocide; to report to the General Assembly on the establishment of the programme within six months from the date of the adoption of the resolution; and to report thereafter on the implementation of the programme at its sixty-third session.

3. The present report outlines the activities undertaken following the establishment of a programme of outreach on the "Holocaust and the United Nations" (hereinafter called "the programme").

II. Goals of the programme

4. The mandate for establishing the outreach programme was assigned to the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat. In consultation with a number of civil society organizations and Member States, the Department decided to conduct the programme under the overall theme of "Remembrance and Beyond". This theme serves to highlight the main two elements of the programme — remembering the victims of the Holocaust and helping to prevent future acts of genocide.

5. As a counterpoint to Nazi ideology which sought to strip victims of their humanness, remembrance focuses on the individual and works to give each person a face, a name and a story. Through the recollection of the journeys of those who perished and by sharing the experiences of the survivors at commemorative events, in exhibits and on web pages, the programme will show that the failure of mankind to prevent the Holocaust has direct relevance to the dangers of genocide that persist today. In sum, the Department intends to serve as a channel of information for the benefit of Member States, who have been urged by the General Assembly to develop educational programmes that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust, and for civil society whose mobilization for Holocaust remembrance and education can help prevent future acts of genocide.

III. The programme

6. In planning specific outreach activities, the Department of Public Information pursues both established and innovative ways to broaden the reach and deepen the impact of the programme. Traditional means include media interviews, press announcements, notes to correspondents, briefings to Member States and visiting student and youth groups, and enlisting the information support of non-governmental organizations associated with the Department. Novel means include special emphasis on audio-visual communication, the performing arts, installations, exhibits, photography and the Internet.

7. Core programme elements developed so far include a commemorative event each January with a keynote speaker and a solemn performing arts element; companion exhibits on various aspects of the issue and with different means of visual expression; an annual briefing by experts for Member States and civil society partners; partnerships with the principal institutions in the field and joint ventures with them; collaboration on events with and dissemination of materials to the global network of United Nations information centres, services and offices; media outreach; a gateway website; a film series and engagement with the academic community.

8. The Department will widen the range of activities offered under the programme as it identifies new opportunities for partnership.

IV. Activities undertaken in the context of the programme

A. Holocaust remembrance

9. To launch the programme, a number of events were held during the week of Holocaust Remembrance Day, which was observed on 27 January 2006. In preparation for this, the Department of Public Information created a special logo and a commemorative poster to depict the theme "Remembrance and Beyond". Set against a black background, a pair of barbed wires, coloured in grey, run horizontally across the page and finally transform into a green-hued vine from which a pair of flowers blossoms. The poster has drawn global praise, numerous demands for copies, interview requests with its designer and, most recently, the American Inhouse Design Award from *Graphic Design USA* magazine. The Department also designed an informative card in English and French which features the logo and outlines the core elements of the programme.

10. On 23 January, the *UN Chronicle* E-Alert, published by the United Nations flagship journal, was transmitted electronically to all permanent missions, United Nations offices and staff members as well as to subscribing non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and individuals. It included articles published in the magazine on the Holocaust, genocide and related issues of intolerance.

11. On 24 January, in collaboration with Yad Vashem, the Department hosted the opening of an exhibit entitled, "Remembrance and Beyond: No Child's Play". At the ceremony, a memorial prayer was recited and a student from the United Nations International School read the poem "Dream", written in the Lodz ghetto by Avremek

Koplowitz, a 13-year-old boy from Poland, who later perished at Auschwitz. This exhibit was complemented by a Holocaust Learning Centre that featured video presentations, photographs, books written by Holocaust survivors and a children's book with drawings and poems by children in the Terezín ghetto as well as computer stations with access to Holocaust victims' names and Holocaust-related and United Nations websites.

12. The same day, the Department and the United Nations Staff Recreation Council Film Society jointly hosted a screening of the movie *Fateless* for members of permanent missions, United Nations staff and non-governmental organizations. The film, based on the novel *Fatelessness* by Nobel Laureate for Literature Imre Kertesz, follows the story of a 14-year-old Jewish boy captured in Budapest and imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp. The film screening was repeated the next day to meet high demand.

13. On 25 January, the Department's Non-Governmental Organizations Section organized a briefing, webcast live and focusing on the importance of tolerance and promotion of cross-cultural understanding to help prevent future acts of genocide in the context of the Holocaust. The briefing was followed by the screening of a United Nations-produced video entitled *A Promise to Remember*, depicting the historical progression of the Second World War, the Holocaust and the birth of the United Nations.

14. On 26 January, the eve of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust, the Department organized a solemn candlelight vigil in the Visitors' Lobby. Six Holocaust survivors from diverse backgrounds, representing the 6 million people whose lives were lost, read excerpts from the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a cantor recited the mourners' Kaddish and a student read an excerpt from *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*.

15. On 27 January, more than 2,100 people attended a standing-room only memorial observance in the General Assembly Hall. Overflow guests had to be accommodated in the Trusteeship Council Chamber. The commemoration was broadcast live at the United Nations Office at Geneva with the assistance of the United Nations Information Service (UNIS). The Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information introduced the programme, which began with a recorded video message by the Secretary-General. A statement by the President of the sixtieth session of the General Assembly was also read on the occasion. It was followed by a statement by the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations. Names and images of Holocaust victims were read and displayed, followed by poignant remarks by Gerda Klein, a Holocaust survivor, and Roman Kent, Chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. The Ceremony concluded with songs from the ghettos and camps performed by the Zamir Chorale of Boston, which preceded a lecture given by Professor Yehuda Bauer, Academic Advisor to the Task Force and to Yad Vashem, the first in an annual series entitled "Remembrance and Beyond". This event was webcast live and broadcast by United Nations Television. The Department also received support from the United Nations Foundation for this event.

B. Worldwide commemoration

16. The network of United Nations information centres, services and offices commemorated Holocaust Remembrance Day either individually or jointly with regional or local civil society partners and Governments. These included special events in Bangkok, Rome (in collaboration with the Jewish community in Rome and the Rome Provincial Authority), and Eritrea (in cooperation with the United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea). UNIS Geneva held a special ceremony where the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva, the Permanent Representative of Israel in Geneva, and a survivor of the Holocaust spoke. "Never Again: A Concert for Life" was arranged by the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) Mexico. Photographic exhibits were mounted at United Nations offices in Bangkok, Nairobi and Vienna; the United Nations Office at Nairobi also held a candlelight vigil. Civil society partnerships included a programme jointly arranged by UNIC Lusaka with the United Nations Association of Zambia and another held by UNIC Rio de Janeiro, which involved the Roma community.

17. In line with the programme's mission to promote awareness of the lessons learned from the Holocaust, a number of United Nations offices organized forums for discussion of the issue. UNIC Ouagadougou hosted a seminar in partnership with the National Commission of Human Rights in Burkina Faso. UNIC Warsaw briefed Polish teachers at a programme organized by the National In-Service Teacher Training Centre and the Polish Association entitled "Children of the Holocaust". UNIC Prague organized a public discussion with two holocaust survivors and conducted a public screening of two Czech documentaries about the quest of students for their Jewish neighbours who disappeared during the Second World War. A debate with the film's producer and Holocaust survivors followed.

18. Media outreach by UNICs yielded articles in the local press in Bogota, Kyiv, La Paz, Tbilisi and Yangon. In addition, UNIC Buenos Aires created a special feature on its website.

C. Building partnerships

19. One of the main goals of the programme is to advance its information outreach through the expertise and additional resources of external partners. Of the partners that have proved to be invaluable are international organizations, Holocaust museums and memorials, survivors' groups, educational institutions, non-governmental organizations, foundations and Member States.

20. In January, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum invited the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information to visit the Museum and discuss areas of collaboration. The Museum has since then participated in a multimedia briefing on the Holocaust and genocide organized for Member States by the Department, and shared, at no cost, copies of a DVD for dissemination to United Nations information centres, services and offices, containing an interview with Lieutenant-General (Ret.) Roméo Dallaire, who is currently a member of the Secretary-General's Advisory Committee on Genocide Prevention.

21. In February, the Task Force, commended in resolution 60/7 for its role in developing educational programmes on Holocaust awareness and the prevention of genocide, invited the Department to make a presentation at the Task Force's

Education Working Group meeting in Vilnius. The meeting afforded opportunity to speak to scholars on Holocaust studies and visit institutions central to its remembrance. As an outcome, separate agreements are under way for cooperation between the Department and the Task Force and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

22. In March, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in London invited the Department to its first annual conference for discussions on the "Holocaust and the United Nations" outreach programme. At the conference, more than 100 local community organizers of Holocaust memorial days from throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland joined academics and survivors of the Holocaust to discuss plans for Holocaust Memorial Day 2007. As an outcome of those meetings, the Department will now become a member of the Task Force's Special Working Group on Holocaust Remembrance Days, charged with disseminating guidelines on best practices and promoting partnerships among member countries.

23. Also in March, the Department was invited by the Westchester Holocaust Education Center in Purchase, New York, to make a presentation. As a result of the meeting, the Department obtained, at no cost, a Holocaust educational DVD with survivor testimonials accompanied by a Teacher's Guide that has been disseminated to the global network of UNICs.

24. In April, the Department established contact with the Museum of Jewish Heritage: A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, in New York. As a follow-up, an official of the Museum was a panellist in a briefing for non-governmental organizations on cultural diversity at United Nations Headquarters in May. The Museum further organized a programme for representatives from a number of institutions involved with the outreach programme.

25. Also in April, the Department launched a film series in partnership with the New York Tolerance Center. The films will provide the context for discussion of Holocaust-related issues among Member States and the public. The screening of the first movie in the series titled *Sophie Scholl: The Final Days* was made possible with support from the Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany in New York.

26. In May, the Department organized a briefing on Holocaust awareness and the prevention of genocide. The purpose of the briefing was to ensure that Member States and civil society were given an opportunity to interact closely with some of the best experts from leading institutions worldwide and become aware of the resources these institutions have developed on the subject of Holocaust education. Panellists were drawn from the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Living History Forum in Sweden. Ambassador Gábor Bródi, the Permanent Representative of Hungary to the United Nations, made a statement on the activities planned under Hungary's chairmanship of the Task Force. The programme was webcast live to reach an international audience.

27. In mid-May, in partnership with scholars around the globe, the Department launched its Discussion Paper Series on the Holocaust and related issues of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice. The first paper entitled, "On the Holocaust and its

implications: in the wake of Holocaust Remembrance Day 2006", was posted on the programme's website. Each paper will be accompanied by discussion questions and produced in English and French. The series will aim to raise the level of debate on these issues in all regions of the world.

28. At the end of May, the Department gave a presentation on the outreach programme to nearly 200 participants from 38 countries at the opening plenary session of the Task Force in Budapest. The plenary subsequently agreed to formalize the working relationship between the Department and the Task Force to provide for consultation and support in facilitating the adoption by States Members of the United Nations of educational curriculum relevant to the Holocaust and, in particular, its importance in preventing occurrence of further genocide; and to support each other's public information activities. The Task Force's Academic Working Group agreed to provide the programme with names of scholars who would be interested in drafting discussion papers, and a number of institutions agreed to make films available for screening in New York.

D. Holocaust remembrance website

29. The Department established a special website to facilitate global access to the activities held under the outreach programme. The website (http://www.un.org/holocaustremembrance) is also intended to serve as a gateway for Member States and civil society to information and resources on Holocaust education, remembrance and research. The website contains links to lesson plans and curricula, teacher training materials, information materials, university programmes, museums, travelling exhibits and archived statements, speeches and video of the events at United Nations Headquarters organized in connection with the outreach programme.

E. Media outreach

30. The Department's programme managers have conducted interviews with leading media organizations and have distributed information materials to a specialized media list. As a result of these outreach efforts, there were more than 41,000 citations on the Internet about the Holocaust remembrance activities at the United Nations in January 2006. The Department also facilitated press interviews of Holocaust survivors who attended events at United Nations Headquarters, facilitated the filming of a documentary filmed at the candlelight vigil on 26 January, and arranged for the live telecast of the 27 January observance to Israel. United Nations Television material on these events was made available through UNIFEED to television stations worldwide.

V. Future activities

31. The Department of Public Information has proposed a number of collaborative projects with institutions attending the Task Force Plenary meeting in May. Discussions are under way with the Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education to develop a project that will provide United Nations information centres with access to survivor testimonies and resource materials in English and French. Another would invite scholars from around the world to contribute articles

on the importance of education about the Holocaust for posting on the programme's website.

32. Future plans also include a presentation in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in June to the annual conference of Association of Holocaust Organizations, which serves as a network of 61 national and 180 international organizations for the advancement of Holocaust programming, awareness, education and research.

33. At the end of June, the Department will address the international conference on "Teaching the Holocaust to Future Generations" at Yad Vashem in Israel. The conference also provides an opportunity for consultation with participants on the organization of Holocaust Remembrance Days.

34. Later in 2006, the Department will co-sponsor a cultural event at the Museum of Jewish Heritage entitled "A Living Memorial to the Holocaust". This event will be held in connection with the "Daniel Pearl Music Days" in October and will aim to use the power of music to promote tolerance and inspire respect for differences, while providing the co-sponsors with a platform for raising awareness of the dangers of hatred, bigotry, racism and prejudice.

VI. Conclusion

35. The Department will continue to work with Member States and expand its partnerships with civil society organizations to commemorate the uniqueness of the Holocaust in human history and to draw from it lessons that may help to prevent future acts of genocide. It will make available to them materials that have been developed by individual experts and institutions with a proven track record in the field of Holocaust remembrance, education and research. The outreach programme will also continue to devise innovative means and methods by which its mandate to further Holocaust remembrance can be realized.